

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

S E C R E T BEIRUT 1860

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR PBOF PEPR LE IS XF
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH BOUTROS

REF: (A) BEIRUT 1833, (B) BEIRUT 1842

1. FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF DETAILS I DID NOT HAVE TIME TO RECORD IN REFTEL REPORTING MY APRIL 3 CONVERSATION WITH FONMIN BOUTROS.
2. ETHELRED THE UNREADY. I SAID PRESIDENT SARKIS HAD INDICATED THAT GEN. KHOURY HAD TOLD HIM HE COULD NOT GO INTO SOUTH LEBANON AS LONG AS PALESTINIANS CONTROLLED TYRE AND NABATIYAH. THIS WAS CONTRARY TO WHAT KHOURY HAD BEEN TELLING US REGARDING PREPARATIONS

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HE WAS MAKING FOR MOVE TO SOUTH. BOUTROS SAID KHOURY'S MIND CHANGED FREQUENTLY. HE ADDED LATER, HOWEVER, THAT SARKIS HAD TOLD KHOURY HE WOULD HAVE TO MOVE TO SOUTH AND TO MAKE PREPARATIONS THEREFORE. SARKIS HAD, NEVERTHELESS, EXPRESSED TO BOUTROS THE VIEW THAT WHEN D-DAY CAME THEY WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO GO THROUGH WITH IT. PRESIDENT WAS NOT PREPARED TO TAKE THE NECESSARY POLITICAL DECISIONS BECAUSE HE WAS CONVINCED THAT AS LONG AS PALESTINIANS WERE IN CON-

TROL OF NABATIYAH THEY WOULD CONTINUE TO FIRE AT ISRAEL AND, SOONER OR LATER, ISRAELIS WOULD HAVE TO RESPOND. FOR LEBANESE ARMY TO BE CAUGHT IN MIDDLE WOULD BE DISASTER. THEY WOULD BE FORCED TO RELY ON ISRAELI SUPPORT, WHICH WOULD BE FATAL. PRESIDENT'S RESERVATIONS WERE NOT IDLE OR CAPRICIOUS. THEY WERE RESULT OF SERIOUS REFLECTION AND THE TAKING INTO ACCOUNT OF STARK REALITIES ON GROUND. (PRESS THIS MORNING REPORTS THAT IT HAD BEEN DECIDED TO SEND GENDARMERIE TO SOUTH BECAUSE "FOR MULTIPLE REASONS IT WAS NOT IMMEDIATELY POSSIBLE TO SEND THE ARMY.")

3. PALESTINIANS. PRESIDENT HAD ALSO BEEN WORRIED BY REPORTS OF PALESTINIAN MANEUVERING. THEIR PUBLIC STATEMENTS WERE NOT TO BE TRUSTED AND THEY WERE DETERMINED TO CAUSE TROUBLE. BOUTROS PERSONALLY WAS CONVINCED THAT A CONFRONTATION WITH THEM WAS COMING SOONER OR LATER. LEBANESE WERE GOING TO HAVE TO FIGHT, AND RESULT WAS GOING TO BE CIVIL WAR. GOD KNEW WHAT THEIR ARMY COULD DO IN THAT EVENT.

4. SYRIANS. BOUTROS HAD MADE STRONG DEMARCHE TO SYRIANS WITHIN PREVIOUS 24 HOURS. HE THOUGHT SYRIANS MIGHT MOVE TO SHUT OFF FLOW OF REINFORCEMENTS AND SUPPLIES AS RESULT. THEY UNDERSTOOD DANGERS OF SITUATION FOR THEMSELVES. IF THEY COULD AVOID TOO MUCH ARAB BLAME THEY WOULD REACT.

5. UNIFIL COORDINATION. BOUTROS NOTED THAT SIILASVUO WAS COMING TO BEIRUT APRIL 4. HE ASKED IF I KNEW WHAT HE HAD IN MIND. I
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SAID I PRESUMED IT WAS QUESTION OF COORDINATION OF SUCH MATTERS AS MOVEMENT OF ARMY AND GENDARMERIE. AT THIS POINT BOUTROS CALLED AHMED AL-HAJJ, COMMANDANT OF INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES, TO INVITE HIM TO JOIN MEETING WITH SIILASVUO AND TOLD HIM TO BRING UP ALL THE QUESTIONS HE HAD. BOUTROS THEN EXPLAINED THAT HAJJ HAD SAID HE WAS READY TO SEND HIS MEN, PERHAPS TO DIE, TO THE SOUTH, BUT HOW WAS HE TO GET THEM THERE? HE HAD NO ONE IN UNIFIL TO WHOM HE COULD TALK ABOUT ARRANGEMENTS.

6. WE THEN DISCUSSED NEED FOR SOMEONE WHO COULD SPEAK FOR UNIFIL IN LEBANON. NOTE FOR USUN: IN THIS CONNECTION, THERE IS ALREADY A SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNSYG IN BEIRUT, JOHN SAUNDERS, WHOSE FUNCTION HAS BEEN LARGELY TO COORDINATE UN RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS. A PROFESSIONAL UN BUREAUCRAT, WE DO NOT THINK HE HAS THE PERSONALITY NEEDED FOR THE UNIFIL JOB. A VERY POLITICAL ANIMAL, WITH INITIATIVE AND SAVOIR FAIRE IS NEEDED--SOMEONE WHO CAN TALK TO ARAFAT AS WELL AS SARKIS, BOUTROS AND KHOURY, AND WHO CAN ESTABLISH A RELATION OF CONFIDENCE WITH THEM, I.E., ANOTHER RALPH BUNCHE.

8. COMMENT: I SHARE BOUTROS' FEAR THAT AN ARMED SHOWDOWN WITH THE PALESTINIANS MAY BE COMING, UNLESS THE SYRIANS OR SOME OTHER

EXTERNAL FORCE CAN PUT THEM BACK IN THEIR BOX, OR UNLESS THERE IS PROGRESS TOWARD A POLITICAL SOLUTION. WE ASSUME SYRIANS ARE AWARE OF THE RISKS AND THAT GIVES SOME REASON TO HOPE THEY WILL REACT POSITIVELY. THE ATTITUDE OF THE OTHER ARAB STATES MAY HAVE A SERIOUS INHIBITING EFFECT ON THE SYRIANS, BUT IF THERE IS A SYRIAN-EGYPTIAN RAPPROCHEMENT THAT WILL HELP.

9. WE CAN WELL UNDERSTAND IMPATIENCE OF WASHINGTON POLICYMAKERS WITH GOL. DELIBERATELY OR OTHERWISE, KHOURY HAS BEEN MISLEADING US AS TO THE ULTIMATE INTENTIONS OF THE GOL AND LAF. SARKIS IS NOT GOING TO SEND ARMY TO THE SOUTH UNTIL HE IS MORE CONFIDENT WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO IT. HE DOES NOT WANT TO SEE IT HUMILIATED AND DEFEATED, PARTICULARLY IF HE SUSPECTS HE IS GOING TO NEED IT FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE BEIRUT AREA.

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10. WE CAN TELL THE LEBANESE REPEATEDLY THAT WE WILL STAND BEHIND THEM, BUT UNLESS WE ARE PREPARED TO LAND TROOPS IT DOES NOT CONVEY MUCH ASSURANCE TO SARKIS, WHO HAS A BANKER'S EYE FOR THE BOTTOM LINE. BOUTROS IS TO WORK ON PROBLEM AND LET ME KNOW, BUT HE IS ALL ALONE. IF HE DOES NOT SUCCEED IN PUTTING SOME STARCH IN SARKIS AND KHOURY, WE MAY HAVE TO RELY TOTALLY ON UNIFIL AND THE SYRIANS. PARKER

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